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Redford touts political side of Miramax pickup 'Oglala'

BY JOHN EVAN FROOK

Miramax co-chairman Harvey Weinstein, producer Arthur Chobanian and actor-director Robert Redford tossed out a political football yesterday in announcing marketing and distribution plans for "Incident at Oglala."

The documentary questions the controversial imprisonment of Native American Sioux Leonard Peltier, who is serving two consecutive life sentences for the killing of two FBI agents during a 1975 shootout at the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota.

Produced for \$2 million through Carolco Pictures, "Oglala" was acquired by Miramax for U.S. distribution in a deal finalized within the last 24 hours.

The release of "Oglala" is timed to coincide with the quinquennial anniversary of Christopher Columbus' landing in North America.

Redford said he hopes it will evolve into an Election Day issue, since pic explores "how our system deals with" Native Americans and could "draw attention to the fact at a time when (the Bush Administration) is under scrutiny."

Weinstein said "Oglala" will

make its theatrical debut in Washington, D.C., in March, with Miramax planning to reach at least 100 markets during the year.

Negotiations are ongoing with exhibitors in Los Angeles, Washington and New York, with plans to spin the movie out to smaller markets later in the year, he added.

An often reluctant public speaker, Redford is slated to continue making the rounds on behalf of "Oglala," with a possible appearance at the National Press Club part of the "full-court press," Weinstein and Chobanian said.

For Miramax, the acquisition of "Oglala" underscores its continued commitment to the documentary genre, following its release of movies such as "The Thin Blue Line," "Paris Is Burning" and "Truth or Dare."

Weinstein said the company hopes that doc will continue to gain momentum and become "as relevant as non-fiction books to the American public."

At the press conference on the Universal Studios lot, Chobanian and Redford said it was their hope that "Oglala" would spur the Bush Administration into action on a long-standing application for executive clemency filed on behalf of Peltier.

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